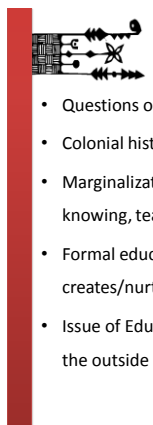


Towards a Cultural Learning Theory for/about Sustainability

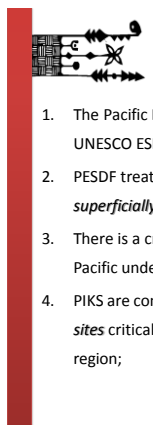
Cecilia Frances Koya Vaka'ota, PhD
Associate Dean Research & Internationalization
Faculty of Arts, Law and Education
The University of the South Pacific
Suva, Fiji



Introduction

- Questions of the *quality* of Pacific education
- Colonial history of prioritizing knowledge from the outside
- Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge and ways of knowing, teaching and learning
- Formal education remains an ‘alien’ imported system that creates/nurtures a cultural learning gap
- Issue of Education *for* Sustainable Development defined from the outside

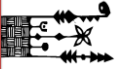
Samoa Conference III August 27 2014 2



Premise

1. The Pacific ESD Framework (PESDF) is a direct derivative of UNESCO ESD conceptions;
2. PESDF treats Pacific indigenous knowledge systems (PIKS) *superficially* without specific commitment;
3. There is a critical need for *Pacific theorization of ESD* based on Pacific understandings of ESD, sustainability and education;
4. PIKS are comprised of multiple *culturally situated epistemological sites* critical to the contextualization of the ESD movement in the region;

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014 3

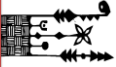


Cont...

- 5. *Pacific heritage arts* (PHA) are examples of such sites offering pedagogical worthiness in ESD mainstreaming; and,
- 6. As significant culturally situated epistemological sites PHA are largely *neglected in educational discourse*;
- 7. Understanding these sites may deepen our understanding of indigenous conceptions of education, sustainability, and ESD.

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

4

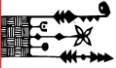


The study

- Culture offers multiple proximal sites of knowing and learning
- Pacific Heritage arts are examples of such cultural proximal sites, and present a tangible means to:
 1. *Contextualize* the schooling experience;
 2. *Reinforce* beliefs, values, attitudes about sustainability and sustainable development; and, ultimately,
 3. *Influence* the behavior of Pacific peoples in community well as between individuals, communities and their often fragile environments.

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

5



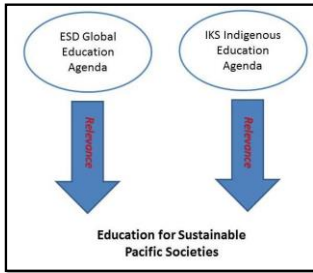
Why this study?

- Personal appreciation of the value & significance of tapa and tattoo practice in Samoan cultural context
- Understanding of the shared history between Samoa and Tonga
- Fuelled by ESD-practice at USP since 2007
- International (and regional) dialogue on ESD is driven by western understandings and philosophies of sustainability
- Need for discourse on Pacific/indigenous knowledge that is generated from within
- Need to theorize ESD and Sustainability from a Pacific perspective

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

6

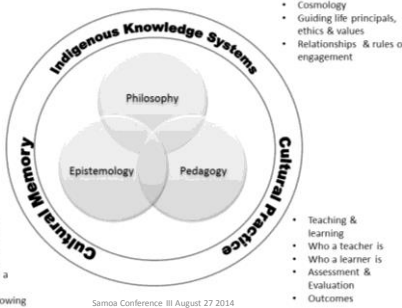
Conceptualizing Education *for* Sustainable Pacific Societies



Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

7

Pacific Heritage Arts as situated epistemological sites



Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

8

Tatau

Carved figures, patterned skins
 Motifs intertwine intricately, like spoken words
 Telling stories of who we are
 They serenade melodies of life, of death

Carved figures, patterned skins
 Art forms, structural representations
 Society's physical, society's social relationships
 Articulating our Va Tapuia

© Excerpt from 'Life Patterns' – Alo, 2006



(L) Painting of Tongan Tattoo - 18th Century Spanish Scientific Expeditions

(R) Tongan Tattoo drawing by d'Urville - early 19th Century



(L) Collection of Blackburn & Blackburn 1893

(R) Semu, 1995

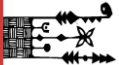
Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

9

- Traditional tātatau practice continues in Samoa, functionality in Tonga discontinued in 1800s.
- Tattoo interest in diaspora and influence of new media e.g. television and the internet, many young people see tattooing as trendy & a cultural statement.
- In both sites, use of modern tattoo machines and inks are common although in Samoa, use of traditional implements and dyes is common.
- Tattoo renaissance in Tonga has evolved & majority of young men, in Nuku'alofa appear to have at least one tattoo.
- Participants (both sites) believe tattoo is an important cultural marker for the individual & wider community
- A sign of cultural affiliation and pride.
- Core values associated with tattoo practice reinforce the life philosophy of vā, placing relationships at the core of both cultural communities.

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

10



Tapa Siapo/Ngatu

*The children, half asleep
Hurry home to the warmth of
Their soft, tattered tapa...*

© 'The Cinema' Thaman, 1987



(L) Kupesi tui collection of Sosefina Malafu of Kautaha Feta'anuveia in Fofaha, Tongatapu made in the 1960s.



(R) Upeti boards from the early 1900s used to make elei prints on fabric by Sina and Sylvia Hanipale, Apia Samoa.



(L) Exhibit at agricultural show in Samoa. Photograph taken by Alfred James Tattersall, between 1880s-1930s



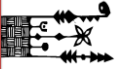
(R) Pathway to Royal Tomb during State Funeral for King George Tupou V. March 27, 2012, Mala'ekula Nuku'alofa, Tonga

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

11

- Traditional tapa (ngatu) widely produced in Tonga, but materials and processes have evolved over time.
- Traditional motifs widely used, but a decline in use of kupesi tui (pandanus hand sewn design strips) & majority of ngatu are hand-drawn.
- In Samoa, production & use of traditional Siapo has declined to the point that u'a trees are a rarity
- Siapo sold in Upolu appear to be sourced primarily from tapa makers in Savaii
- Limited number of elei boards available feature floral designs with hibiscus, breadfruit and a range of leaf patterns used in fabric printing.
- Participants shared collective view that tapa is integral part of cultural identity
- Core values embedded in tapa culture reflect family-centric collectivist nature of the two cultural communities
- Essentially about relationships within/between families & communities, with nature and with the spiritual past.

12

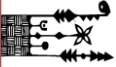


What can we learn about sustainability (sustainable living) and resilience from tapa and tatau?

- Epistemological dynamic of tapa and tattoo, sustainability is a way of life grounded in the shared life philosophy of Vā.
- Vā, commonly referred to as sacred relational spaces/relationships, is understood as the space between or socio-spatial relations (Ka’ili, 2008; Anae, 2010).
- As a life philosophy comprising a collectivist worldview of the two cultures
- Reinforced by active demonstration of specific values that affirm its ideology.

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

13

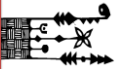


Vā is not a metaphor for sustainability

- **It is a sustainability-thinking worldview that provides guiding principles for sustainable living.**
- There is extensive writing on Vā as relational space(s) (See for example, Wendt, 1999; Mahina, 2002; Bryne, 2005; Poltorak, 2007; Ka’ili, 2008; MacIntyre, 2008; Thaman, 2008; Anae, 2010; Peteru & Percival, 2010; Maa, 2011; Saltiban, 2012; Van der Ryn, 2012).
- Contrastingly, here, it is theorized as the foundational life-philosophy of Samoan and Tongan culture.
- A philosophy about sustainability, sustainable development and resilience.

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

14



Vā as Sustainability, as life-philosophy, worldview & praxis

- Tapa and tattoo are culturally situated proximal sites of knowing, learning, being and belonging.
- Evidence in teaching, learning, reinforcement, interpretation, assessment and re-positioning of self within the wider socio-cultural community that takes place in both art forms.
- Both sites reinforce the value of spiritual connectedness with self, community, environment and the cosmos (Tamasese, 2007; Betham, 2008; Thaman, 2008; Mahina, 2011).
- Responsibility and duty within these relationships.
- Tapa affirms women’s commitment to their designated responsibility in maintaining balance within the socio-cultural space gift of Siapo/Ngatu (meaalofa/mea’ofa).
- Tātatau affirms men’s commitment to service, protection of and providing for the basic needs (tautua/fatongia or: ngafa)/Samoa – women’s status/protection

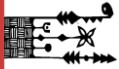
Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

15

The concept of Vā as a life philosophy

| Criteria | Concept | Samoa | Tonga |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Status | Sacred Relationships | Vā Tapuia Recognition of spiritual relationships that necessitate specific socio-cultural codes of conduct. | Vaitavai |
| Processes | Nurturing Relationships | Tausi le vā The processes, by which the space is nurtured, developed and maintained. | Touhi vā |
| | Dewolving Relationships | Soi le vā The act(s) of deliberately disrupting the relational space leading to negative/bad relations i.e. disharmony. | |
| | Resolving & Maintaining Relationships | Tou le vā Processes by which broken/strained relationships may be resolved/improved/maintained to re-establish balance and social cohesion. | The idea behind teu le vā is encompassed in the concept of Touhi Vā. |
| Outcomes | Positive Relationships | Vā lelei Positive, harmonious, well-maintained, beautiful relational space i.e. good relations. | Vā lelei Close relational spaces within familial connections and/or friendships marked by warmth and fond affection. |
| | Negative Relationships | Vā fa'avae Respectful relationships | Vā ofi Close relational spaces within familial connections and/or friendships marked by warmth and fond affection. |
| | | Vā leaga Negative relational space i.e. poor/weakened/bad relations. | Vā fasmaki Negative relational space i.e. poor/weakened/bad relations that may be reconciled through reattribution. |
| | | Vā kovi Negative relational space i.e. poor/weakened/bad relations that are generally considered irreconcilable. | |
| | | Vāvanaga The opposite of Vāofi as in distant relational spaces marked by feelings of disconnectness. | |

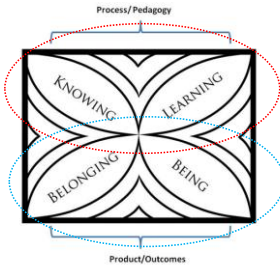
Samoa Conference III August 27 2014 16



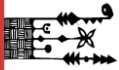
Tuli - A transformative cultural learning theory

4 components that inform both the teaching and learning process and educational outcomes:

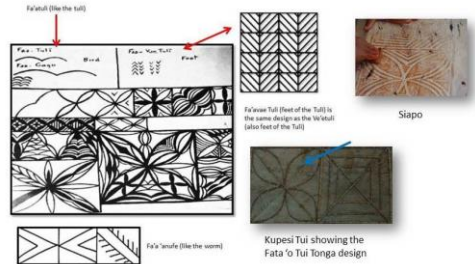
1. Knowing
2. Learning
3. Being
4. Belonging



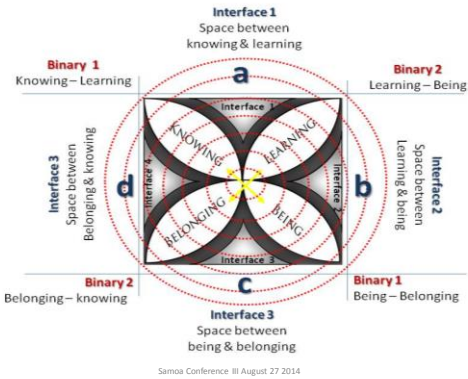
Samoa Conference III August 27 2014 17



The Design Element



Samoa Conference III August 27 2014 18



Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

| |
|--|
| Binary 1a: Knowing – learning (Learning to know/do) |
| This binary is a curriculum strand that brings together the foundations of education (philosophy, sociology and psychology) in particular ontology, epistemology and pedagogy. |
| Binary 1b: Being – belonging (Learning to be) |
| The third binary reflects the positioning of the self within the broader socio-cultural context of the family unit (extended) and the wider community. It represents the negotiation of the individual sense of purpose and connectedness within society imbued with a sense of connectedness – as being part of an active, evolving whole system. |
| Binary 2c: Learning – being (Learning to learn/unlearn/relearn) |
| This binary culminates in the process of self-realization/ actualization where the learner becomes (through the teaching – learning process) aware of his/her sense of self, strengths, weaknesses, abilities and is able to articulate a person sense of self-worth through active participation in the teaching and learning process. |
| Binary 2d: Belonging – knowing (Learning to live together) |
| The final binary is a follow on from the community standpoint, in which collective knowledge becomes accessible to the individual (insider knowledge) and through practice and experience, s/he is able to access a deeper level of knowledge as a privileged insider of the wider community. |

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

| |
|---|
| Interface 1: The space (Vā) between Knowing – learning |
| Cosmology, Cosmogony, Ontology, Epistemology, Pedagogy |
| Interface 2: The space (Vā) between Learning – being |
| Internalization, self-realization, self-actualization, personhood, sense of self-worth, purpose |
| Interface 3: The space (Vā) between Being – belonging |
| Conscientization, family, community, group affiliation, civics, citizenship |
| Interface 4: The space (Vā) between Belonging – knowing |
| Life-long learning, contextualized praxis as 'learning' and 're-learning' over changing times (tā) i.e. new knowledge, experiential knowledge, knowledge acquired through relationships and active participation in the socio-cultural dynamic of the wider social network. |

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

Why a new model/theory for Transformative Pacific Education?



© Ryan Reyes - www.istudio.com/

- Relevance, Context and Quality
- Relevance movement (Nabobo, 2006b)
- Re-thinking Pacific Education Initiative for/by Pacific Peoples (RPEIPP – Vaka Pasifiki) draws attention to the inherent questions surrounding education in PICs. These are:

- What is education for?
- What is quality education?
- Education for what and whom?
- What are sustainable futures?

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014

Endnote

The challenge is therefore to look carefully at what we have before we dismiss it, to search for meaning and substance within ourselves before going abroad, and to watch for the clutters of life that can unnecessarily impede our focus on what really matters. What matters in the pursuit of indigenous Pacific knowledges is that it survives – and survives because it gives us meaning and belonging. Everything else is clutter (Tamasese 2005, p68).



Email 1: cresantia.koyavakauta@usp.ac.fj

Email 2: cfkoya@gmail.com

Samoa Conference III August 27 2014
